5 Phases of
Theory Application
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Theory case plan is a plan of action of how to effectively approach and respond to a client and a client situation through theory application. There are five phases that make up an effective theory case plan. These are:

1) Theory Approach
(assess client data to determine initial theory response),
2) Theory Assessment
(use of theory to explore client situation),
3) Theory Intervention
(outlines what would be done to achieve affect change) ,
4) Theory Case Plan
(statement of work responsibility and journal of progress), and
5) Theory Termination
(determine success toward goals and time for termination).

Understanding How to Apply Theory

Theory application may often seem oxymoronic as theory intuitively already suggests varying mindsets of understanding the world and drive action. While application suggest the same, driving action, and putting to use. However, we elaborate here about theory application a little more because it is not intuitive to all. Many times theory is simply viewed a as a paradigm and nothing else. It is viewed as a looking glass to see but not experience the world. It is to this point of experience however, that we want to get to in this text. Yes we see how people experience the world through our lens but we can also apply theory to understand, organize and understand the experiences of others without having lived the exact same life and the knower. This is similar idea to multiculturalism. Some assume that the more we view that our cultural underpinnings can only be understood by those that have experienced it then we essentially remain divided. But the opposite is also true if we believe that others can come to know our experiences and embrace its difference and uniqueness then we can bring the world together – united as one.

Admittedly through the embracing of theory as both a lens and an experience we can apply theory to clients and clients situations to help us build rapport, listen and organize their stories, determine patterns, conduct assessment, formulate a plan of action, and still monitor progress and move towards termination.

It is with this view then that as student social workers or practitioners that we must understand what we do and learn about how theory can inform this practice.

Define what a social worker does in the client-social worker role

Social work is a unique profession with its practitioners intersecting every part of human life and their environments of interaction. Therefore, when conducting a session time must be dedicated to various tasks. Simplistically time is allocated to

i. Meet & Greet
ii. Builds Rapport
iii. Use theory to organize story pattern, determine, and make an assessment of client situation
iv. Use theory to guide organization of client’s problems
v. Develop theory case plan
vi. Implement theory plan in collaboration with client to see goodness-of-fit and change in behavior or situation
vii. Use theory plan to monitor progress, make adjustments where necessary, and move closer to termination upon change in behavior or situation

Each aspect of the process expects a different process and hints to where theory can be applied. More time is spent in the next couple pages outlining specific areas of theory application.

Meet & Greet - A.K.A Theory Approach

A large part of the initial practice with clients in a social work setting is the meet and greet. This is where the social work would have reviewed any intake, referral, or available client information to assess what may be needed from the client-practitioner relationship. The meet and greet time is often preceded by the preparation stage of practice. This is where the social worker having reviewed the intake information actively reviews the information available, explores any leads that may be necessary, arranges for the first meeting, and prepares personally on how to approach the client and the client situation. Other steps that take place surround what Cournoyer (2005) calls the beginning where each partner in the process introduces themselves, shares expectation and policies of interacting and outlines the initial purpose. In a theory application, this phase can be termed the THEORY APPROACH.

Builds Rapport & Listen to client’s story - A.K.A. Theory Assessment

After outlining the initial purpose and engaging in the beginning of the client-practitioner relationship the next phase is building rapport. The phase of building rapport is salient to the relationship for the client. However, for the practitioner it is the phase where one assesses the client and their situation. Questions of the problem, history, environment, strengths, and goals are ascertained. This phase may span two or more sessions. In some cases this is where, depending upon time and data collected to date that the practitioner engages in a bio-psycho-social-spiritual assessment. This is an assessment tool based on questions of how the client is functioning in biologically, psychologically, socially, and spiritually. This assessment sets the stage for what priority areas must be addressed and also assesses the client’s abilities and resources in determining motivation and time needed to affect change. In theory application this is can be termed the THEORY ASSESSMENT phase.

Organize story patterns - A.K.A. Part B of Theory Assessment

In gathering the necessary information and dialoguing with the client the practitioner must engage in organizing any patterns and identify any behavior and or emotional inconsistencies and discrepancies between what is said and done. It is through this phase that the THEORY ASSESSMENT phase takes shape. This information is informed by all the criteria for theory analysis such as personality, nature of the individual, power status, and so forth.

Guide organization of client's problems - A.K.A. Theory Intervention

Once there is a clear organization of patterns and clarity in the presenting problems and challenges the practitioner is encouraged to engage in the identification of possible interventions. The interventions however, are not just arbitrary assignments or tasks the practitioner sees fit to present to the client because it makes sense or they have seen others recommend those interventions. The interventions must be informed by the client situation, the assessment, and the approach the practitioner chose at the start of the session for working with the client. This phase is what can be termed the THEORY INTERVENTION phase. New practitioners can use the theory and thought processes or principles that guide the theory to formulaically determine what interventions may work to affect the change the client and the work hopes to see.

Design of interventions using theory application - A.K.A. Theory case plan

This theory intervention can encompass several phases of identified steps for the client to follow and implement over a period of time with the practitioner chronicling progress based on self-reported outcomes and behavior or emotional observations. At this point since the practitioner has an idea of where the client came and where they would like to go with some idea of how to get there, the practitioner can dedicate some time to developing a THEORY CASE PLAN. A theory case plan is a plan of action of how to effectively approach and respond to a client and a client situation through theory application. It is a step by step plan of what has been done and what is expected to be done for and with the client. It eventually becomes the case that the case manager will manage over time and the practitioner will use to assess readiness for termination.

Implement theory plan & monitor progress - A.K.A. Theory Implementation

In collaboration with the client as the plan is put into effect there is an ongoing assessment of goodness-of-fit and monitoring for change in behavior and or situation. The plan is tweaked and amended as the client-practitioner relationship and client situation experiences stumbling blocks but essentially remains as the contract between the two parties.

Uses theory and practice to… - A.K.A. Theory termination

Upon satisfactory self-reports, personal goal attainment scaling, intervention outcomes and behavior and emotional observations the practitioner and client can agree on termination. This termination is also based on the practitioner's practice wisdom and theory evaluation. This phase can be termed the THEORY TERMINATION phase. It is where the practitioner goes back to the initial theory approach and assess if the client met their goals using that approach and using a specific approach assess growth. Many practitioners use the Stages of Change to gauge theory success and effectively equip the client with next steps based on upcoming phases.

5 Phases of Theory Application

As noted previously a **theory case plan is a plan of action of how to effectively approach and respond to a client and a client situation through theory application**. There are five phases that make up an effective theory case plan 1) theory approach, 2) theory assessment, 3) theory intervention, 4) theory case plan, and 5) theory termination.

Theory Approach

A theory approach phase of theory application is the assessment of client data prior to work with them and determining what theory or theoretical framework may work best to guide the client-practitioner relationship and work. The approach then guides the entire work with room for change and redressing if the theory initial chosen falls short. In applying the theory would be chosen and the practitioner will determine what questions this theory may ask a client and then those questions guides the exploring and assessment process in conjunction with the PHEGS (Problem, History, Environment, Goal, and Strength exploration) process. This will be outlined in the upcoming section.

Theory Assessment

Without assessment we only guess. **The theory assessment phase of theory application is the use of the theory approach to begin to understand the client situation.** When we try to understand the client situation we are:

1) Actively collecting and organizing information from the case;
2) Inferring and interpreting the information retrieved;
3) Evaluating the client's situation (assessing client's physical, behavioral, social functioning, resources, strengths and weaknesses);
4) Defining the problem to be addressed; and
5) Planning intervention(s) to respond to the problem through some model or approach – a treatment plan.

However, this phase is the actual application of the SALT 4-Prong Approach. It is where the theory approach to the situation is used because of the strengths and areas of focus of the theory but there may be limitations of the theory approach therefore other theories are brought in to redress for the shortcoming. This is done as much times as possible, bringing as much theories as possible to better understand and respond to the client situation and or challenges. Therefore the theory assessment may take the form of multiple theories to explore and understand various aspects of the client's life and or situation while literally conducting an assessment using tools such as the bio-psycho-social-spiritual assessment and the SALT 4-Prong Approach.

Definition of Social Work:

"Professional activity of helping individuals, families, and communities enhance or restore their capacity for social functioning and creating conditions favorable to that goal" (NASW, 1973)

ASSUMPTIONS OF ASSESSMENT

1. Humans are by nature good
2. Humans are free but with limitations
3. The past is important
4. Human behavior can be understood and predicted
5. Though different there are many similarities among humans
6. Humans can be influenced to change

7. Humans can be held accountable
8. Humans are not quite fully aware of intrapersonal influences on functioning

Tasks for social worker using this approach

Hollis, F. (1968). *A typology of casework treatment*. NY: Family Service Association of America.

(1) Sustain the conversation on all 4 aspects 1) bio, 2) psycho, 3) social, and 4) spiritual

(2) Focus on direct influences of all aspects to client's growth hindrance or enhancement

(3) Help client ventilate, air out, and share their stories

(4) Describe and explore all aspects of client's lives – Past, Present, and Future

(5) Evaluate impact of client's environment and experiences

(6) Help client reflect on the current person-situation relationships

(7) Help client reflect on patterns of personality and behavior impact

(8) Help client reflect on past and its effect on current functioning.

Theory Intervention

The theory intervention phase of theory application is the **portion of the client-practitioner relationship and work that outlines what would be done to achieve the work required to affect change**. This work is guided not by guess treatment but by theory. The practitioner in collaboration with the client uses the theories that informed the approach to the case and the assessment to identify what interventions may be necessary to bring about the needed change. For instance the practitioner may have started with strengths perspective to inform their practice but then realized that they needed to know how to move from understanding the client's strengths to action. At this time the empowerment theory may have been brought it to redress for the shortcoming of the strengths perspective. The empowerment theory suggests that one must examine the power distribution in the client situation and then identify and fill gaps with resources. This then moves the practitioner to action. In the action stage the practitioner then goes back to what they gained from the client in the assessment and PHEGS process about their goals and strengths and design specific intervention to bring about the needed change.

Theory Case Plan

As the entire work with the practitioner and client evolves there is need to chronicle the work. This is the Theory case plan phase of theory application. In this phase the practitioner simple begins to document the work with the client from theory approach to theory intervention and specifically lists the interventions and plan for implementation to allow for monitoring and progress towards goal accomplishment. This theory case plan becomes the statement of work responsibility and journals the client's progress and the efforts undertaken by the practitioner. The theory case plan houses all of the other 4 phases of theory application and is used to determine termination.

Theory Termination

Theory termination is last phase of theory application. It is the phase of the process where the practitioner assesses the case plan to determine if the client has or is on target for meeting their goals and sets a time for termination. To do this effectively after consulting the theory case plan the practitioner must also go back to the initial theory approach to assess effectiveness and client's satisfaction.

Theory Application

Without application the first theory phases are just that, phases. **The theory application phase is the method where the initial planning is actually implemented and the work with the client begins.**

Developing an Integrative Case Plan for work with a client

Some time was spent in the sections above highlighting what may be included in a theory application process. However, when it is all put together this process is called a theory case plan. This case plan in actuality is informed by the PHEGS (exploring the **P**roblem, **H**istory, **E**nvironment, **G**oals, and **S**trengths of client situation) process for client work and guided by the SALT 4-Prong Approach. The PHEGS process is a sequential organization of areas of content to explore with the client beginning with the exploration of the problem, the history, the environment, the goals, and the strengths. This entire process may span the life of the working relationship with the client and practitioner.

As outlined below the problem has the practitioner assess what the client sees as the current problems and why is help being sought now. The history looks at both the personal and problem history of the client. It assess what they have been through in the past to get where they are today and assessing if the problem has occurred before in the past and what they did at that time to resolve it. It may also include what they have tried to date to address the problem now. The next area of content is the environment assessing how the problem is personally affecting the client but also who else the problem is affecting and how. It also asks how those persons or entities are coping as a result of being affected by this problem. The last two areas of content for exploration are goals and strengths. It specifically seeks the client's participation in determining what they would like to see as a product of the work together and what resources, strengths, and or assets they bring to inform and affect the change they hope to see (Chang, Scott, & Decker, 2009).